Blath of Kildare

(l. c. 5th Century/6th Century)

BRIEFING

Saint Blath or Blathnait (Latin: Flora) is an Irish saint who served as a lay-sister and cook in Saint Brigid's abbey at Kildare. Her name, Blath, is the Irish word for 'flower.' The Martyrology of Gorman playfully refers to her as 'blooming Blath', thus the Latinized Flora, that Saint Blath is also referred to. Beyond her role as cook and her involvement in one notable miracle associated with Saint Brigid, her recognition mostly stems from her association with Saint Brigid and brief mentions of her in martyrologies and hagiographical texts. Her feast day is January 29.

LIFE

Blath is described as a humble handmaid who lived in simple obedience during the fifth or sixth century. Her primary role was that of cook for Saint Brigid's monastic household in Kildare. While she held a subordinate position within the convent, her fulfillment of ordinary duties earned her a great reputation for sanctity and the respect of her esteemed abbess, Saint Brigid, and the wider community at Kildare.

It is famously recorded that "bread and bacon in Brigid's company were better than a banquet elsewhere." This statement, directly mentioning Blath's role as the "lay sister in charge of Brigid's kitchen" who "was a saint, too", highlights the spiritual value placed on the food and service she provided.

Historicity relating to her death

Mervyn Archdall, a historian of Irish monasteries, speculated that Saint Blath died in 523, the same year he believed Saint Brigid passed away. However, Archdall provided no specific data to support this date, and it appears to be an assumption based on the year generally associated with Saint Brigid's death.

MIRACLES

The most prominent miraculous incident in which Saint Blath is directly mentioned is the Miracle of Loch Lemnachta (meaning 'New-milk Lough'), which is recounted in the notes to the Martyrology of Oengus and other sources concerning Saint Brigid. The story highlights Blath's role in the management of the convent's food production:

> *On one occasion, eight bishops from Hui Briuin Cualann arrived to visit Saint Brigid at Kildare. Saint Brigid, concerned about providing for her guests, directly asked Saint Blath, whether she had enough food for the bishops. Blath replied, "No" (Latin: Dixit ilia non). Feeling ashamed by the lack of food, Saint Brigid was then instructed by an angel to milk the cows again. Following this divine instruction, the cows produced an extraordinary abundance of milk, filling all the tubs and enough to have filled all the vessels in Leinster. The milk overflowed the tubs and formed a lake, which became known as Loch Lemnachta, or 'New-milk Lough'.*

VENERATION

Saint Blath's feast day is observed on January 29. She is commemorated in several significant Irish calendars, including the Martyrology of Donegal and the Martyrology of Gorman. The notes to the Martyrology of Oengus also record her name for this day.